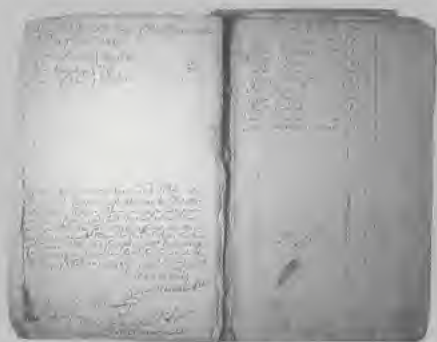


❖ Locate data - use primary and secondary sources

What are primary sources? Primary sources are original documentation. Diaries, letters, bills, accounts, legal documents, songs and poetry, gravestones, paintings, photographs. Secondary sources are materials that are one step removed from the original documentation. It can be difficult to locate primary material. Sources may be in archives in other cities, or not readily available. Don't despair – as this book illustrates there are always other avenues to explore.

250



✧ Select and record relevant data

Starting a research project is daunting. There are probably a lot of books already written on your topic. Don't panic and try to read every one of them, remember that not all the material written will be relevant to your topic. The careful selection of material is paramount. This book will give you some tips on the selection of material.

✧ ✧ Evaluate the data

Learning how information is gathered and about the time in which the event occurred, that is, 'the historical context' will enrich how you research a topic. How you construct your argument and use quotations from your sources is of vital importance when you are writing up your research. Give a range of voices, don't use one book or one newspaper, try to look for a variety of sources. Question the validity of what you are using, who the author was and whether his/her opinion can substantiate your argument. By evaluating the data in this way you will be transforming how you write. It helps you move away from simply rewriting the contents of the main textbook on the topic.

✧ Organise your data and present findings in a well-structured format

A skilled researcher is someone who uses the material gathered effectively, someone who can collate the range of source material in an order that will allow them construct a good argument. If the material is collected with a rationale in mind, the task of writing it up will be made much easier.

Structure is vitally important. Set out the facts using a range of evidence as well as the different types of source material to make your argument. Plan a logical format, an Introduction, and the thrust of your argument. Set out the main points in a number of sections. If your topic is too broad in scope it will be very difficult to keep it succinct. It is vital to have a well thought out and comprehensive conclusion. Remember when you are writing - think about how you would explain your topic to an audience in a few pithy statements - this will keep you focused. If you find you are giving extra information to your reader or explaining how you have written your piece - it is not finished.